



## — Montana Office of Public Instruction

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State Superintendent

**Senate Education Committee  
January 10, 2007  
Senate Bill 123 - Full-Time Kindergarten  
Superintendent Linda McCulloch's Remarks**

For the Record, I am Linda McCulloch, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Thank you to Sen. Carol Williams and Rep. Wanda Grinde for sponsoring SB 123, for Full-Time Kindergarten which is requested by the Office of Public Instruction.

We are purposely using the term "Full-Time Kindergarten" to mean kindergarten all day, every week day. Often the term "Full-Day Kindergarten" is used to mean a half-time kindergarten program where the student attends school all day two days a week and a half day on the third day – for instance, all day Monday and Wednesday and half day on Friday.

Now is the time to offer Full-Time Kindergarten to all Montana students. Supportive national research and studies from states that have long offered Full-Time Kindergarten are overwhelming. Studies further indicate NO detrimental effect on students participating in Full-Time Kindergarten. With a billion dollar budget surplus, now is the time to make sure all of our students are achieving at the highest level they are capable of.

Full-Time Kindergarten is all about academic success for students, parental control and local school district control. It's about our 145, 416 Montana public school students.

Full-Time Kindergarten is supported a number of times in the Montana definition of a "Basic system of free quality public elementary and secondary schools" as required by Article X, Section 1(3) of the Montana Constitution and upheld by the Helena District Court and the Montana Supreme Court. Full-Time Kindergarten directly addresses the needs of at risk students which is one of the educationally relevant factors of the quality definition (SB 152, 2005 Legislative Session). Further, the quality definition requires the Legislature establish a funding formula based on these educationally relevant factors. The education of at-risk students must be addressed to satisfy the Court's directive. Most importantly, it's the right thing to do for our students.

SB 123 provides full-time ANB funding for kindergarten students enrolled in a full-time public school kindergarten program. SB 123 does NOT require schools to offer a Full-Time Kindergarten program, but provides full-time funding for those districts that do. SB 123 does NOT require parents to enroll their child in Full-Time Kindergarten. Full-Time Kindergarten will continue to be optional, just as half-time kindergarten is today.

## BACKGROUND

Nationally, nearly all (98%) children attend at least half-day kindergarten. And there has been a steady increase in students attending kindergarten full-time with 23% in 1988 and 55% in 1993. Today 63% of kindergarten students nationwide attend a full-time program.

In Montana, 63 school districts offer a Full-Time Kindergarten program. This represents 28% of kindergarten students around the state who are attending a Full-Time Kindergarten program. These school districts decided to expand the kindergarten day because it supports what their kids need for continued academic and social success.

In addition, today's ever-increasing call for student and school accountability make Full-Time Kindergarten appealing. If a student is not reading at the third grade level by the end of third grade it is difficult and very expensive to catch that child up. In the fourth grade the emphasis is not on learning to read, but on reading to learn – in science, social studies, math problems, and literature.

Economists agree that investing in Full-Time Kindergarten provides a significant return on investment through higher student achievement and lower dropout rates. Research has shown that a \$1 investment in a child's earliest years of schooling yields a \$3 or even more rate of return to the public by reducing costly special services and even incarceration. (University of Chicago, Committee for Economic Development)

Around the nation, 28 states provide funding for Full-Time Kindergarten, Nine states require that districts offer Full-Time Kindergarten, and two states, Louisiana and West Virginia mandate Full-Time Kindergarten attendance.

In 2006, Wyoming unanimously passed legislation to fund Full-Time Kindergarten for their students.

## ACADEMIC BENEFITS

Full-Time Kindergarten has been proven to be a vital step in starting children on a successful path to learning. Children who are enrolled in Full-Time Kindergarten programs, in comparison to half-day programs, demonstrate:

1. Greater progress in reading, math and general learning skills
2. Significant gains in social and emotional development
3. Fewer grade retentions and special education placements
4. Higher scores on achievement tests
5. Reduced behavioral problems
6. Significantly stronger academic gains over the course of the kindergarten year than their half-day counterparts
7. Levels the playing field for disadvantaged kids who enter school already behind
8. Effective in closing the achievement gap and lowering dropout rates
9. Positive effect on both short and long term student achievement
10. Significantly higher report of homework completed at age 15

Repeated studies have shown there have been NO detrimental effects to children attending Full-Time Kindergarten. Students easily adjust to longer days in school without any major difficulties. In reality, students are better prepared for a successful transition to first grade.

The positive outcomes appear to be even larger for disadvantaged students. Poor and minority students especially benefit from participation in full-time programs. Research tells us that Full-Time Kindergarten significantly helps to close academic achievement gaps for both low-income and minority children.

The benefits to Full-Time Kindergarten do not end when the student completes their kindergarten year. Studies show there is a positive effect on both short and long term student achievement.

## ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The economical benefits of Full-Time Kindergarten extend beyond the classroom. Research on “quality early education” emphasizes the long-term benefits for the student and society. A longitudinal study revealed that students with early childhood education opportunities were more likely to complete a higher level of schooling, have higher monthly earnings at age 27 and were more likely to own a home. These students were also less likely to receive social services and had fewer arrests. The engine that drives economic development really is education and in this case early education.

## PARENTAL CONTROL

Enrollment of students in Full-Time Kindergarten will be voluntary, just as half-time kindergarten is now. We know the best judge of a child’s school readiness is their parents. Parents will decide if their child is ready for full-time, half-time or no kindergarten at all. I appreciate parents who believe that their child is not ready for a full day of kindergarten or who believe that their child will benefit more from spending the other half of the day at home with them. I applaud the decision made in the best interest of their child.

I ask that you do not take away from other parents the ability for them to make a decision in the best interest of their child. That parent deserves to be able to choose Full-Time Kindergarten if that is in the best interest of their child.

Our changing society greatly influences this drive for Full-Time Kindergarten. More children live in dual-income or single parent families, and are transported between school, day care and home throughout the day. All of those transitions are stressful for children and their parents, and can detract from the learning – both academic and behavioral – that is taking place.

## LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT CONTROL

Local school boards would still have the option to provide Full-Time Kindergarten based on a district’s budget, facilities, and staff, and would be responsible for implementing it in a way that most benefits their students and their school system.

Research shows there are savings to be had in the reduction of high cost students by fewer grade retentions and special education placements. Cost savings may be realized in the elimination of mid-day buses. In addition, there will be savings to local taxpayers for school districts that already have Full-Time Kindergarten (see fiscal note).

## FUNDING

In Montana, kindergarten students receive half-time ANB funding. OPI’s budget request is \$26 million in the 2009 biennium to provide ANB full funding for kindergarten students enrolled in public schools. SB 123 does not require schools to offer Full-Time Kindergarten, but provides funding for those districts that do. Our \$26 million per biennium is based on an estimate of 80% of the state’s 10,600 kindergarteners attending full-time.

I am also requesting through House Bill 2 \$10 million in one-time-only funding for initial start up costs. Some school districts may have difficulty providing Full-Time Kindergarten initially because of staff, budget, or facility limitations. Providing startup costs would help districts overcome the financial barrier.

Senate Bill 123 recognizes the academic, social and economic benefits that Full-Time Kindergarten can provide for our youngest students in public school. This bill understands that not all kindergarten students begin school with the same experiences and seeks to provide full ANB funding for expanded learning opportunities that start kids off on a good foundation for life.

Full-Time Kindergarten isn't about politics or partisanship. It's not about the Governor or me. It's not Democrat or Republican. It's about 145,416 Montana students. It's about the 10,000 kindergarten students enrolled this year, 10,000 next year, 10,000 the year after, and so on. It's all about your children, your grandchildren, and the kids next door. And it is about their future and Montana's future.

Full-Time Kindergarten has been well received by parents and educators across the state who have experienced it. I ask the committee to support SB 123. Thank you for your time today.

